

Neighborhoods: Greeks in Bay Ridge

By MARCIA CHAMBERS

The quiet streets and comfortable homes of Bay Ridge that in past decades attracted Scandinavians, Irish and Italians are now luring increasing numbers of Greeks to that tranquil corner of Brooklyn.

No one knows just how many Greek families have moved to Bay Ridge in the past decade. The Greek-American community here is not as large as the one in Astoria, Queens, the largest in the city. "But we're getting there," said one Greek elder who has lived in Bay Ridge since 1965. In the last two years at least 5,000 Greeks have settled here, increasing the Greek population to between 35,000 to 50,000, according to various estimates. On the basis of these figures, Greeks constitute 28 to 40 percent of the area's residents.

Real estate brokers of Greek extraction say Greek-American families are snapping up pre-World War II one- and two-family brick houses on clean, tree-lined streets as fast as they can raise a down payment, which often is \$20,000.

"They're going hog wild buying property," said the Rev. Constantine Xanthakis, who as pastor of the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church presides over a thriving parish at 8401 Ridge Boulevard, 2 blocks from Shore Road with its exquisite view of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge.

Have Faith in Real Estate

"Greeks are domestic minded," they put their value and faith in immovable property," Father Xanthakis said in an interview the other day as he showed a visitor architectural plans for a proposed \$1 million cultural and educational center scheduled to be completed in two years.

Bay Ridge, one of the few Republican strongholds in the city (it voted 3 to 1 for Richard M. Nixon in 1972 and regularly sends one of the five Republicans in the boroughs to the City Council) is also one of the last middle class, almost completely white areas in Brooklyn. Less than 1 per cent of the population is black or Spanish-speaking. And from all accounts, Bay Ridge intends to keep it that way.

Its politics are conservative. It sends Republican-Conservatives to the State Senate and State Assembly. An index of their conservatism is provided by the New York Civil Liberties Union, which in 1976, gave local legislators ratings ranging from 6 to 25 percent.

In the last decade, many of the children of Scandinavian and Irish descent have moved, many to Staten Island and the suburbs. About 20 percent of the 126,000 residents are over 60 and live in rent-controlled apartments in four- and six-story brick buildings.

Norwegian was once offered as a language course at Bay Ridge High School. No more. In the last two years, however, Fort Hamilton High School, which fronts on the Narrows on Shore Road, has offered bilingual academic courses in Greek as well as a course in modern Greek.

In the commercial section — from Third Avenue to Fifth Avenue and the main thoroughfare, 86th Street—scores of small shops cater to the new arrivals, Syrians, Lebanese, Chinese, and Greeks—and to the old-timers. On many blocks there is an Irish bar, a luncheonette (often owned by Greeks) and an Italian bakery.

Bay Ridge residents are resolutely middle class. They respect family, education and property. They believe in hard work, cleanliness and they are committed to their church and their compatriots. There are about 100 active



The New York Times/Barry L. Erman
The Rev. Constantine Xanthakis, pastor of the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church in Bay Ridge, with two of his parishioners in front of the church.

civic, social and ethnic organizations, which wield considerable power and prod politicians and the police when the occasion arises.

At the moment, the citizens of Bay Ridge are worried about crime, particularly burglaries. High burglary rates are taken for granted in other Brooklyn neighborhoods, but not in Bay Ridge, where there are few cases of rape, murder or arson. But in Bay Ridge, crimes against property strike at the heart of the community.

And so, 100 volunteers, trained by the police, will soon embark in unmarked cars on nightly neighborhood surveillance.

Still, most people in Bay Ridge feel safe walking alone on the streets. Safety, and its corollary — "A good place to bring up children"—is one reason Greeks are moving here. Mihail Emanoilidou left Athens more than two years ago, and after six months in Manhattan, he sent for his wife and two daughters and started anew in Bay Ridge.

Mr. Emanoilidou, 40 years old, said he was attracted by the clean neighborhood, the nearby public school for Anastasia, 10, and Katherini, 7½, the Greek Orthodox Church and the safe

streets. The family lives in a five-room apartment that adjoins a dry cleaning store. Mr. Emanoilidou recently purchased the house and the store.

How was he able to afford property?

"Hard work and an economical life," he said through Father Xanthakis, who served as an interpreter during a recent interview. Mr. Emanoilidou's great problem is learning English. He is proud that his daughters now speak it fluently. But he understands most questions and said in English how he managed to buy his home and store:

"Big mortgage."

A short, stocky man with curly brown hair and an easy smile, Mr. Emanoilidou is confident he will make a go of his business. But since the shop is on a side street on Bay Ridge Avenue, it has been touch-and-go despite his 14-hour days. Mrs. Emanoilidou works as a seamstress in the shop.

"Sometimes it is very dead," he said, but his voice, while worried, contained pride in the ownership of property.

The Emanoilidou home is immaculate, but Mrs. Emanoilidou, 34, worries about the plague of the New York City housekeeper—cockroaches.

"It took eight months to clean it out," she said. "Terrible." Her mother, clad in a black head shawl and black dress, sat in the living room during the interview and said nothing. She is visiting the family.

Anastasia, now in the fifth grade, learned English in less than a year. Her mother, she said, made her read and translate and write "Greek to English sentences" at night. And she watched television nightly, trying to learn new words. Her teacher at Public School 102, she said, is very nice. "Teacher repeats everything twice," Anastasia said. After school, she and her sister attend the Greek school at their church.

Basil Capetanakis and Seymour Hionas, two of the dozen Greek real estate people in Bay Ridge, understand the new arrivals and their striving to be independent homeowners.

"We get hard-working people here. Often the whole family works. They make a few dollars and purchase their homes. They stick together. I sell to one Greek and soon he brings over his brother, or uncle or cousin and they buy," Mr. Capetanakis said. One-family houses that five years ago sold for \$45,000 now go for \$60,000 or \$70,000 the brokers said.

Customers Change, Too

Along Shore Road, the local "Gold Coast," as the police term it, prices for one family homes with sweeping lawns begin at \$125,000. They are so scarce that two Greek families recently purchased their homes from blueprints.

Long ago, said John Uhr, who opened his candy store on 89th Street and Third Avenue in Bay Ridge 30 years ago, "I sold Italian-, German- and Yiddish-language newspapers." "No more," he said. "Some have moved away or died." Most are now simply second or third generation Americans.

One of the few candy stores remaining in the area with a fountain (egg creams are 30 cents), Mr. Uhr knows the name of every child who comes in after school to purchase penny gum or candy—now two cents each.

"We see the kids grow up, move away, return to visit." His wife, Rebecca, nodded. "Then one day they walk into the store and say to their own kids, 'this is where daddy bought candy when he was your age.'"

Mr. Uhr is delighted with the new arrivals, the Greeks. Their industry and their family commitments remind him of times past.